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DEPT FOR NEA/MAG

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TS](#)
SUBJECT: MOD MORJANE: NO SECURITY THREAT TO US MILITARY,
BILATERAL MILITARY RELATIONS HAVE IMPROVED

REF: A. TUNIS 463
[1](#)B. TUNIS 461
[1](#)C. TUNIS 314
[1](#)D. TUNIS 179

Classified By: Ambassador Robert F. Godec for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Minister of Defense Kamel Morjane stressed the excellent bilateral military relations in the Ambassador's farewell call July 10 and said there was no threat to the US military from the reported plot involving two arrested Air Force officers (Reftels A and B). Specifically he:

-- downplayed the threat against the US military. The GOT is continuing its investigations but the case did not reach the level of a real threat;

-- cited increased funding for FMF as a key example of the improved bilateral military relations;

-- praised Obama's Cairo speech as the way the US can recover the position, impact, and consideration it deserves in the region.

[1](#)2. (C) The Ambassador:

-- welcomed the good US-Tunisian military relations and thanked Morjane for his efforts to strengthen the military relationship, but pressed Morjane to deepen information sharing;

-- informed Morjane that additional 1206 funding had been approved but consideration of a another tranche would be pushed into the new fiscal year;

-- emphasized that President Obama and the Administration are committed to Middle East peace but the United States needs the support of Arab countries to make progress. End Summary.

Farewell Call

[1](#)3. (C) On July 10, the Ambassador paid his farewell call on Minister of Defense Kamel Morjane. The Minister was accompanied by Colonel Major Ghorbel, the Director of Cooperation and International Relations and Captain Major Khammassi, Chief of Staff. The Ambassador was accompanied by Defense Attach Colonel Warren Gunderman and acting Pol/Econ Counselor Laura Byergo.

Plot Against US Military not Serious

¶4. (C) Morjane said the Ministry of Justice was investigating the case of the two officers accused of plotting to attack US military personnel but that the threat was not serious. He said, "I am not concerned at all," the media exaggerates a lot, and the US should not be concerned for the safety of its personnel. "We can have joint training tomorrow and I will sleep soundly." He doubted the officers involved had any plans against the United States. What was of concern to the government and needed to be investigated was the contact these military officers had had with civilian Salafies. He said the fact this contact had been noticed and acted upon was a confirmation of the security measures in place. The officers and some of the civilians came from the same lower class Tunis neighborhood highlighting the social and economic pressures the GOT is facing. During his last visit to the United States in 2008, he had emphasized the problems of securing the borders but that there are also internal problems. He then opined that possibly the lawyer who spoke to the press (Samir Ben Amor - Ref A) was trying to attract attention. He assured the Ambassador that if there was any risk to the Ambassador or any of the Embassy staff, the Ambassador would be the first to know.

Bilateral Military Relations - Excellent

¶5. (C) Morjane was warm and enthusiastic in his comments regarding improvements in the bilateral military relationship during the Ambassador's tenure, specifically citing improved communications and the increase in FMF as examples. The

Ambassador thanked Morjane for his efforts and noted especially the work he had done to welcome and brief Congressional delegations visiting Tunisia. He referred to the recent May 24 Joint Military Commission and asked the Minister to follow-up with more information on the military's supply needs and strategic plans. He also informed Morjane that 1206 funding had been approved (\$8.82 million) but any additional funds would not be considered until next fiscal year. Morjane said contact with Congressional representatives was important, especially in the American system. He mentioned that he had just received a report July 9 from the Tunisian Defense Attach in Washington on the role various senators had played in the budget process.

Middle East Peace and the Western Sahara

¶6. (C) Morjane noted President Obama's Cairo speech saying, "This is the way the United States can recover the position, impact and consideration it deserves in the region." Often a new administration waits until its second mandate or until the end of its term before tackling the problems of peace in the Middle East, but the fact that the Obama Administration is working seriously on the problem so early creates hope and optimism, he said. "We can't expect the US to be neutral, but we hope it will be objective. The US needs to make both sides feel they are being treated the same. Israel must accept that it will have to make some concessions for peace." The Ambassador underlined the efforts the Administration was making and said the US will continue these efforts but needs the help of the Arab countries to make progress. Morjane replied that was clear, and he hoped the Middle East would see better days in the future.

¶7. (C) Morjane also praised the efforts the United States was undertaking on the Western Sahara issue saying this was one of the key obstacles to the realization of the Maghreb Union. He estimated that the economies of the Maghreb could possibly see a 2-3 percent increase in real GDP growth rates if the Union became a reality. Tunisia and Algeria are working on an east-west highway that he hoped would actually meet at the border. Right now the Tunisian side is farther south than the Algerian side. He said the dream was to have

a direct highway from Tunis all the way to Casablanca.

COMMENT

18. (C) Morjane has worked hard to improve bilateral military relations. He is aware of the Embassy's repeated requests for more information regarding the MOD's spending plans and for closer cooperation on information sharing generally. Nonetheless he was emphasizing the positive and the fact that, from a GOT point of view, the relationship has improved. His remarks about the importance of good relations with members of Congress are revealing of the GOT's assessment that the relationship is made in Washington.
Godec